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## Brezhnev and the Politburo

Central Intelligence Agency  
National Foreign Assessment Center

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### *Key Judgments*

"Collective leadership" in the Soviet system requires the maintenance of a relative equality of the Politburo's members and the preservation of the autonomy of the Politburo against encroachments from outside or within.

Brezhnev has substantially reduced this equality by:

- Expanding the Politburo, thereby diluting the influence of individual members, and bringing into it narrow specialists as well as a number of his close allies.
- Compartmentalizing the Politburo, especially by strengthening the State Defense Council of which he is Chairman.
- Elevating the Secretariat and reducing nonsecretaries to little more than second-class members of the Politburo.

Brezhnev has also encroached upon the Politburo's autonomy by:

- Convening the Politburo irregularly, making it easier to manipulate.
- Using his discretionary authority over Politburo business (setting agendas, circulating proposals, and summing up Politburo deliberations) to strengthen his personal influence.
- Acquiring in 1972 an office within the Kremlin, in the government building where both the Politburo and the Council of Ministers hold their meetings and from which previous Soviet rulers have governed.
- Undermining the principle of tenure by ousting his opponents.

In the years since 1973, Brezhnev's authority relative to the Politburo's has appeared to fluctuate somewhat according to the state of his health and the fortunes of his policies; the basic trend, however, has been strongly

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upward. Brezhnev has used his power cautiously in making policy, but the Politburo has taken a number of hard decisions, such as to reduce sharply the growth rate of investment and to maintain a high priority for agriculture despite lagging production in heavy industry.

The sharp rise in the cult of Brezhnev in recent years attests to the strength of his political position and his capacity to compel his colleagues to acknowledge his authority. Nevertheless, despite his colleagues' participation in the rites of the Brezhnev cult of personality, it cannot be ruled out that they, like Khrushchev's colleagues, may be conspiring against the party's leader. Brezhnev is probably less vulnerable to a conspiracy than was Khrushchev, however, because he recognizes the danger and is guarding against it.

Failing an effective conspiracy or a physical collapse, Brezhnev is likely to exert strong influence in the Politburo for some time, and he may even enhance his power before he finally loses it.

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## PREFACE

The author of this assessment, [ ] is scholar in residence with the [ ] the Office of Regional and Political Analysis. The paper presents his views on a problem that is the subject of some controversy in the Intelligence Community. Besides contributing to this debate, it presents [ ] evidence of the operations of the Central Committee Politburo that in recent years has not been systematically employed in analyses of Brezhnev's influence in the Politburo.

## Brezhnev and the Politburo

Debate over the extent and limits of Brezhnev's power centers on the question of his capacity to influence the deliberations of the Politburo. This is a recurrent problem in analyzing Soviet politics since the balance between the personal authority of the general secretary and the collective authority of the Politburo has varied markedly in Soviet history. In the initial phases of a succession the balance has generally favored the Politburo over the general secretary, but with the passage of time the balance has tended to shift in favor of the general secretary. This suggests that the Politburo is vulnerable to encroachment by the general secretary.

What are the reasons for the Politburo's vulnerability and what are the instruments available to Brezhnev, as general secretary, for exploiting this vulnerability? What is the extent of Brezhnev's present influence in the Politburo? This paper will address these questions.

A convenient base point is an authoritative study of the Politburo compiled in April 1972, shortly before Brezhnev's power began a new sharp and steady rise which has continued, with occasional setbacks, in the present.

While this study concluded that the USSR was at that time governed by an oligarchy centered in the Politburo, it described certain practices which, it can be inferred, threatened the relative equality of the Politburo's members (hence their authority as oligarchs) as well as the Politburo's autonomy. The existence of these practices in 1972 pointed up the vulnerability of the Politburo as an oligarchical body. For a discussion of the Politburo as an oligarchical body and what is needed for its stability, see Myron Rush, *Political Succession in the USSR* (Columbia University Press, 1968), pp. 97-103, 270-271; also, Myron Rush, *How Communist States Change Their Rulers* (Cornell University Press, N.Y., 1973) pp. 14-18.

### Equality

Full members of the Politburo are theoretically equal, but by 1972 substantial inequalities in practice were evident. Those working outside Moscow usually did not attend Politburo meetings, and sometimes were not even polled on matters before the Politburo. Only the most senior Politburo members were consulted on some key issues; others, including full members residing in Moscow, were ignored. And some Politburo members were taxed with trivial questions that placed substantial demands on their time without enhancing their influence on policy.

There were other reasons for inequality in the Politburo. Its members, particularly the less senior ones, were deeply engaged in administering the affairs of a particular party or government institution and had limited time available for examining the most general policy questions. Brezhnev may not have exaggerated when he told a Western statesman in August 1970 that most Politburo members did not speak at its sessions, but only listened. A few months after he said this, the size of the Politburo was increased from 11 to 15, 12 of whom were Moscow based and regularly attended its sessions, making it even less likely that all members attending Politburo sessions participated actively in its deliberations. Five of these 12 Moscow-based full members performed specialized functions for which they had been prepared by a specialized education and a specialized career and therefore probably found it difficult to master all the materials

relevant to deliberations on the diverse agenda. (This was true in varying degree of Kulakov, Pelshe, and Grishin, and, after 1973, of Grechko and Gromyko.)<sup>2</sup>

Another important explanation of inequality among senior members of the Politburo, which was apparent almost from the beginning of the post-Khrushchev Politburo, was the difference in access of the members to the party apparatus and to territorial party organizations. Membership in the Politburo in itself conferred no right to set tasks for the party, according to Brezhnev, although actually little could be accomplished in economic or political work without the party's participation. Early in the post-Khrushchev period, Premier and Politburo member Kosygin's 1965 draft report on industrial reorganization contained a section dealing with party organization and party tasks in implementing the reorganization.

Brezhnev strongly objected to the section:

There should be no mention in this section of party work. This is our prerogative—the Central Committee's [Brezhnev presumably has in mind the prerogative of the *Secretariat* of the Central Committee]—and not [sic] for any statesman of our government.

Brezhnev's view prevailed. The end result, in time, was to reduce nonsecretaries to little more than second-class members of the Politburo. At the same time, Brezhnev, as General Secretary of the Central Committee, maneuvered to remove his major rivals from the Secretariat and to strengthen his dominance of that body.

### Autonomy

It was necessary to maintain the boundaries of the Politburo as a collective body if it were to

<sup>2</sup> Formalism in the working of the Politburo has been emphasized by several [ ] whose testimony, while by no means decisive, warrants consideration [ ]

Politburo meetings in the early post-Khrushchev period "were formal, and became even more formal after the ascendancy of Brezhnev. The discussions were stilted and cloaked in Marxist ideology. Decorum was maintained and informal discussion between members of the Politburo were held only in personal meetings."

operate as an oligarchy. In practice, however, the lines were blurred. Full (voting) members were not set off from others within an exclusive circle. Attendance at Politburo meetings, for example, was not restricted to full and candidate members, but included the junior secretaries of the Central Committee and certain party and government officials who attended regularly.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the distinction between voting and consultation was often lost during the interval between Politburo sessions, when the Central Committee's General Department coordinates the views of interested parties on measures before the Politburo.

The external threat to the Politburo's autonomy, however, was derivative; the chief threat was from within. The Politburo needed someone to direct the process of making decisions—to call meetings, circulate proposals, draw up agendas. It might be supposed that this function could be effectively performed either in rotation, or by a small committee,<sup>4</sup> but as the system evolved during Brezhnev's tenure as General Secretary, it was he who took over the task. Brezhnev prepared Politburo sessions and introduced such strict rules that he was able to exert a strong influence on its deliberations, perhaps even to infringe on the Politburo's control over its own deliberations.

Members who wanted particular problems discussed, according to the 1972 study, were obliged to submit a written request three days in advance of a meeting, and Brezhnev selected agenda topics from these submissions. No subject could be raised at a meeting that had not previously been placed on the agenda. If a new problem emerged during Politburo discussion, its consideration was generally put off to a subsequent meeting. Brezhnev, when he was present, presided at Politburo meetings. A consensus was

<sup>3</sup> Currently, First Deputy Premier Tikhonov is the most notable example of regular attendance by a government official who is not on the Politburo.

<sup>4</sup> It seems possible that in past times when a triumvirate has been singled out for prominence within the Politburo (for example, Malenkov, Beria, and Molotov, following Stalin's death, and Kamenov, Zinoviev, and Stalin, following Lenin's death), it has been jointly responsible for managing the Politburo's affairs. If so, this has not been a durable arrangement.

sought on the subject discussed, and, according to Brezhnev's own testimony, after he judged that one had been reached, his formulation of the consensus was usually accepted. No vote could apparently be taken without Brezhnev's permission; after the vote, his signature was needed to validate the decision. When no consensus could be reached, a majority vote prevailed, but, according to various Soviet leaders, this rarely happens. [

] no dissenting vote has been observed. Presumably members who do not favor a proposition abstain from voting, thus preserving the facade of unanimity. While these practices gave order to the Politburo's procedures and may have expedited its work, their effect was to place narrow constraints on the initiative of individual members and to limit the Politburo's capacity to govern itself as a collective body.

The Politburo's autonomy as an independent deliberative and policymaking body was also at risk, potentially, from several Politburo committees. These included Commissions on Industry and (apparently) on Agriculture, and, most notably, the Defense Council, which had major responsibilities in security affairs. Politburo committees had been used by Stalin to subvert the Politburo's collective authority, and Brezhnev may have used them—though far more cautiously and with due regard to protocol—for a similar purpose. While the Defense Council's measures were subject to formal approval by the Politburo, members of the Politburo who did not serve on the Defense Council may have lacked the necessary information and involvement in military affairs to set aside its recommendations. In any event, Brezhnev, who chaired the Defense Council, was in a position to exert strong influence on it, and he may also have been in a position to restrict the Politburo's involvement in the Defense Council's affairs.

The powers awarded the General Secretary, or arrogated by him, to order the Politburo's affairs may have been thought safe in Brezhnev's hands. His modest demeanor and, at least in the early years, his lack of self-assurance, made it appear

that Brezhnev was no Khrushchev. Yet there was a danger that the substantial powers allowed Brezhnev to manage the affairs of the Politburo could also be used by him to manipulate it. The vulnerability of the Politburo was the greater since it lacked its own permanent staff; external staff support was provided by the General Department of the Central Committee, headed by Chernenko, a close Brezhnev protege.

Since the requirements for a stable oligarchy include a rough equality of the oligarchs and the autonomy of the oligarchical body, there were grounds to question whether the Soviet Politburo in April 1972 would be able to preserve whatever oligarchical powers it possessed intact against the encroachments of an ambitious and determined General Secretary. Brezhnev's ambition and determination, as well as his skill in political maneuver, are undeniable. Having prepared the way at the 24th Party Congress in April 1971, when three close associates were chosen to the Politburo (Shcherbitskiy, Kulakov, and Kunayev), Brezhnev in the next two years succeeded in removing three major barriers to the growth of his power. These protective devices, which had been established in the mid-1960s after the removal of Khrushchev, called for:

- Regular sessions of the Politburo.
- Denial of an office to Brezhnev in the Kremlin, where the Politburo meets.
- Tenure for Politburo members who did not violate the Politburo's rules.

#### **Brezhnev Disrupts the Orderliness of Politburo Proceedings**

For the Politburo to be effective, certain executive functions must be performed by particular members—agendas must be set, discussions summarized, extraordinary sessions called when necessary, and the like. If the Politburo is to function as a collegial body and if its members are to participate actively in its work, these tasks must be performed in a way that gives order and regularity to the Politburo's proceedings. If meetings are often convened suddenly and arbi-



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trarily, without adequate time to distribute the relevant documents to allow them to be read, Politburo members necessarily will be ill prepared to take part in discussion of the agenda questions or perhaps even to vote knowledgeably on them. This would be particularly true of members who have no executive responsibility for a question under discussion.

The holding of regular meetings of the Politburo does not necessarily mean that the Politburo operates as an effective collegial body, but the failure to convene ordinary sessions on a regular basis is bound to impair the functioning of the Politburo. Recognizing this, the Soviets, in both public and private comments on the working of the Politburo, have for many years given support to the notion that the Politburo convenes frequently and regularly: it is said to meet every week at a set time (Thursday at 3 p.m.), following careful preparation by the Secretariat (said to meet on Tuesday) and the Presidium of the Council of Ministers (said to meet on Wednesday). The reality, however, is more complicated.

from 1966 until late 1971 the Politburo did meet fairly regularly

\* Known meetings of the Politburo before January 1966 (under Khrushchev and in the 15 months following his removal) were infrequent and irregular. This may have been because coverage was inadequate, although it seems more likely that meetings of the Politburo were not regularized until that time. The earliest known

This suggests that Brezhnev's success at the December 1965 plenum of the Central Committee in purging Podgornyy from

The annual number of known Politburo meetings declined and remained at a relatively low level during the next three years.\*

Why this irregularity? Brezhnev, as General Secretary, is known to be responsible for setting the date and time of Politburo sessions. The irregular scheduling coincides with the period in which Brezhnev's authority in the Politburo manifestly increased and his relatively good health enabled him to maintain an active schedule.

the Secretariat and in consolidating his own position in that body may have been won at the cost of his acknowledging the Politburo's right to meet regularly and to take formal votes on substantive issues.

\* Brezhnev reported to the 25th Party Congress in 1976 that the Politburo had met in session 215 times since the previous Congress in April 1971. Thus, if Brezhnev reported accurately, the reduced frequency of known Politburo meetings in 1972-74 may be due in part to less effective coverage.

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#### **Brezhnev Acquires a Kremlin Office**

In the early years of Brezhnev's tenure as head of the Secretariat, his sole office, just as those of Stalin and Khrushchev in the early years, was outside the Kremlin. It was located a short distance away in the Central Committee building, on the fifth floor adjacent to the meeting room of the Secretariat. The Politburo conducts its affairs inside the Kremlin, in the Council of Ministers building. Brezhnev therefore was obliged to come to the Politburo for its regularly scheduled meetings.

Brezhnev evidently came to believe that the distance of his office from the Politburo's meeting place was a handicap in his dealings with the

Politburo. When, in the early 1970s, Brezhnev became increasingly involved in diplomatic negotiations, he could plausibly argue that he needed a Kremlin office in which to receive Western statesmen, who rarely were allowed entry in the Central Committee building. Finally, on the occasion of President Nixon's visit to Moscow in mid-1972, Brezhnev acquired an office in the Kremlin adjacent to the conference room where the Politburo meets.

Once he had the office, Brezhnev stressed its symbolic importance. At a press conference with Western journalists who received a rare invitation to visit the Politburo conference room, for example, Brezhnev posed the question, "Why does the work of the Politburo take place in the Kremlin?" This was not an invention of his own, he observed, but a tradition that had originated in Lenin's day and continued to the present.<sup>9</sup> (Actually, when the tradition originated, Lenin was head of the government, and it was natural for meetings of the Politburo—even though it was a party body—to be held inside the Kremlin, in a room adjacent to Lenin's office in the government building; although the party's headquarters in the Central Committee building later became the decisive political center, the tradition was maintained of holding Politburo meetings in the room where Lenin had held them.) On another occasion, when Ambassador Stoessel made his initial call on Brezhnev, he was told by Brezhnev that it had been Lenin's custom to hold Politburo meetings in the Kremlin, a custom that had been maintained, and this was why he had an office there as well as in the Central Committee building. (Brezhnev said nothing to Ambassador Stoessel about having to wait almost eight years to acquire his Kremlin office.) Once Brezhnev was established in the Kremlin, the Politburo came to him for its meetings, gathering informally in his office before moving into the adjacent Politburo room for the formal meeting.

Brezhnev's acquisition of a Kremlin office strengthened his position with respect to the

Council of Ministers as well as the Politburo. His prolonged physical separation from the Council of Ministers during his first eight years as the party's senior secretary may have reflected a Central Committee decision, adopted when Khrushchev was purged, that it was "inexpedient" to combine in one person the duties of party first secretary and Chairman of the Council of Ministers.<sup>10</sup> After May 1972, although Brezhnev remained outside the government, he used his new vantage point inside the Council of Ministers building to concern himself increasingly with governmental affairs, not only in the conduct of foreign affairs but also, though more cautiously, in the administration of the economy.<sup>11</sup>

Brezhnev's Kremlin office thereafter was his chief place of work

<sup>9</sup> P. A. Rodionov, *Kollektivnost'* (Moscow, 1967), p. 219.

<sup>10</sup> The Council of Ministers had been symbolically downgraded in the interval between the 23rd Party Congress (1966) and the 24th (1971), when its head, Premier Kosygin, dropped from second to third in the order of rank of Politburo members. The Council of Ministers was downgraded further after 1977, when Brezhnev assumed the post of Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet.

The evidence suggests that after May 1972, when Brezhnev acquired his Kremlin office, he did not attend Secretariat meetings regularly and left supervision of the party apparatus largely to other members of the Secretariat, particularly Kirilenko.<sup>13</sup> While it would be incorrect to suppose that Brezhnev no longer concerned himself with the affairs of the Secretariat, he apparently distanced himself even further from the daily work of the central party staff. What arrangements Brezhnev made to safeguard his interests within the party machine—whether he depended increasingly on Kirilenko, or relied on other secretaries (for example, Chernenko) to keep an eye on Kirilenko—is not known; their effectiveness may be crucial, however, for Brezhnev's prolonged tenure in office.

#### Brezhnev Undermines the Tenure Principle

The strongest barrier to encroachment on the Politburo's autonomy was probably the tenure principle, which was late in succumbing to Brezhnev's assault. According to this tacit understanding, which has been operative for a time during each Soviet succession, members who had not violated the Politburo's rules could not be ousted from it.<sup>14</sup> While its members were protected in this way, Brezhnev was obliged to be cautious in dealing with individual opponents who had reason to suppose their positions in the Politburo were secure. Not until the spring of 1973 did Brezhnev succeed in expelling members from the Politburo. Only then, perhaps, did

Politburo members find it necessary to weigh carefully the danger of persistent opposition to Brezhnev's will leading to their removal.

At this point the cult of Brezhnev entered a new stage. After the 1973 purge of Shelest and Voronov, members of the Politburo were obliged in their public speeches to acknowledge Brezhnev's special position in the Politburo. The customary formula referred to the Politburo "headed by" Brezhnev. (Until then, only Brezhnev's closest proteges, men like Kunayev, used the expression.) An alternative formula that was widely employed by Politburo members and others to acknowledge Brezhnev's preeminence credited the country's successes to "the leadership of the Central Committee, the Politburo, and Brezhnev personally [*lichno*]." (This expression is not altogether felicitous—*lichno* is reminiscent of "cult of personality" [*lichnost*], a practice for which Stalin and Khrushchev had been condemned once they were no longer in office.)

The men added to the Politburo when Shelest and Voronov were ousted were the government ministers responsible for state security, defense, and foreign affairs. Government leaders, rather than party officials, may have been chosen for the Politburo by Brezhnev in order to broaden the institutional basis of his authority. The men chosen—Andropov, Grechko, and Gromyko—evidently were personally close to Brezhnev, and after entering the Politburo they seemed to supplant Kosygin and Podgornyy as Brezhnev's closest advisers in times of international crisis.<sup>15</sup> In the Middle East crisis that arose several months after the Politburo shakeup (October 1973), for example, Brezhnev appeared to consult more closely with the new Politburo members, although they were not yet members of the State Defense Council, than with Kosygin and Podgornyy, who were members. Podgornyy subsequently lost all of his leadership positions, and

<sup>13</sup> These appointments also had the effect of placing men in the Politburo who were preoccupied with administering government organizations and therefore not as likely to be effective participants in the full range of the Politburo's activities.

<sup>13</sup> This can be inferred from the usual interval of several years following initiation of each succession before members of the Politburo have been expelled. A knowledgeable Soviet official, [redacted] implied this also when he hypothesized to American interlocutors that Shelest's ouster from the Politburo in 1973 must have been due to his violation of a collective decision. The arrest and execution of Lavrentiy Beria in 1953, the sole clear exception, can be attributed to the special circumstances of his personal control over the political police, which posed a threat to his Politburo colleagues. (The departure of Mikoyan and Shvernik from the Politburo following the 23rd Party Congress (1966) had the appearance and, in part, the reality of a retirement because of age.)

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Kosygin in 1975 and 1976 evidently did not attend sessions of the State Defense Council.

### **The Post-1973 Period**

In the years since 1973, Brezhnev's authority relative to the Politburo's has appeared to fluctuate somewhat according to the state of his health and the fortunes of his policies; the basic trend, however, has been strongly upward. The caution exercised by Politburo members after 1973 in opposing Brezhnev presumably has been considerably reinforced by the removal of three more members of the Politburo (Shelepin in 1975, Polyanskiy in 1976, and Podgornyy in 1977), making a total of five ousted in the interval between 1973 and 1977.

The cult of Brezhnev's personality continued to burgeon. Increasingly "the instructions and conclusions" embodied in Brezhnev's public utterances were held to be binding on party organizations and state and social institutions. Especially after Marshal Grechko's death in 1976, Brezhnev's name became more closely associated with the military establishment: he was promoted to the highest current rank in the military forces; his resounding military titles (Chairman of the State Defense Council, and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces) were made public; and, as in previous cults of a Soviet leader, his military qualities and accomplishments were acclaimed, including the award of an undeserved "Order of Victory"; Brezhnev's stature as a world leader was trumpeted, and he was held up as a model Communist to be emulated by the young. Books by or about Brezhnev, which first began to appear in 1970, became a flood in celebration of his 70th birthday in 1976 and in connection with his assumption of the office of Chairman of the Supreme Soviet Presidium in 1977. His war memoirs first began to appear in early 1978, and soon republican and regional meetings were being held in a campaign to make Brezhnev's memoirs a means of studying ideology, mobilizing the masses, and so on. The 1978 May Day celebration raised his cult a notch higher, honoring him with a huge portrait carried

at the head of the procession and with large floats that quoted his speeches, referred to his travels, and cited his books.

The sharp rise in the Brezhnev cult is undeniable. Some Western observers, however, question its significance. They deny that the enhancement of the Brezhnev cult results from a strengthened position in the Politburo, arguing instead that the cult is chiefly a device by which Brezhnev has compensated for his failing policies and faltering health. But this ignores the fact that the cult of Brezhnev exacts a cost from the Politburo members who practice it—since it elevates Brezhnev above themselves—and from the regime itself. After the debunking of Stalin and Khrushchev, cynicism about published praise of the Soviet leaders is widespread. Expending this currency on an aging Brezhnev, whose infirmities and poor public performances are displayed regularly on television, will assuredly depreciate it further.

Yet this currency, like esoteric communication generally, performs an important function in the Soviet political system: it serves to orient those who are active in Soviet politics. The cult of a leader is a key element of that leader's power; it conveys to middle and higher level officials a rough notion of the respect they must show that power, both in performing the rites of the leader's cult and, what is more important, in implementing his policies. For Politburo members to inflate Brezhnev's cult when they believe his power to be on the decline, therefore, would be to engage in a willful deception of the higher levels of the Soviet leadership with the effect of propping up Brezhnev's authority at the expense of their own. Indeed, the elevation of Brezhnev has been accompanied in some measure by reduced deference to the Politburo, which recently has had to share its public image as a policymaker with the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet (now chaired by Brezhnev) and, to a lesser extent, with the Council of Ministers. It follows that if Politburo members publicly defer to Brezhnev's authority and eulogize his leadership, they do so because they are compelled to, and only Brezhnev's power could compel them. Hence, if the

cult of Brezhnev is thriving (as it assuredly is), it must be because his position in the Politburo has grown stronger.

Assuming that Brezhnev has strengthened his personal position, has his increased power been evident in the conduct of Soviet policy, or has he simply played the role of a mediator and broker? Many observers have suggested that Brezhnev seeks a consensus in the Politburo, a process that tends to evade hard choices and produces middle-of-the-road policies shaped by pressures from bureaucratic interest groups. There is some truth in this, but the notion that the Politburo has taken no bold decisions is not borne out by the record. Particularly in the last few years, the Politburo has made a number of hard decisions for which a consensus probably was lacking. (It also appears likely, although evidence is not abundant, that the adoption of these decisions required the full weight of Brezhnev's authority.) Among the decisions on difficult questions were:

- Adjusting to the slowed growth of the economy by sharply reducing the growth of investment in the Tenth Five-Year Plan rather than making major cuts in the growth of consumption or defense.
- Continuing Brezhnev's policy of giving agriculture high priority, allotting it over a quarter of the funds for investment—about the same share that it had received in the previous years when investment funds were much more abundant. The alternative—shifting a portion of the investment funds allotted agriculture to heavy industry—probably received substantial support from vested interests in heavy industry, but was rejected.
- Reducing growth of investment funds for civilian heavy industry in the Tenth Five-Year Plan. This has been reflected in the weak performance of the steel, energy, and machine building sectors of the economy. It seems likely that the responsible officials in heavy industry—party secretaries, ministers, and enterprise managers, whom Western observers have considered the strongest interest group in the USSR next to defense

officials—have been pressing throughout the first half of the plan period for a diversion of funds from other sectors to heavy industry to improve its economic performance; but it appears that so far, at least, the Politburo has resisted.

- Increasing Soviet involvement in Africa after 1975, a difficult decision because it involved a departure from the more cautious policies of the past and entailed a diversion of funds to provide increased support for Cuba and new support for Soviet clients in Africa, and may not have been supported by a consensus.

While it cannot be proved that these decisions emanated from Brezhnev personally, they are not the kind of conclusions that a divided Politburo could readily arrive at without effective leadership from a dominant member.

If it is granted that Brezhnev occupies a powerful position in the Politburo that enables him to compel other Politburo members to praise him extravagantly and permits him on occasion to impose major policies on his reluctant colleagues, how secure is that position?

\* This was true at least during the regime's first decade, although it is unlikely that the principle was always observed by Stalin in the last years of his rule.

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Even now, some of Brezhnev's colleagues, although they are obliged publicly to eulogize Brezhnev, may be conspiring against him, just as Khrushchev's colleagues conspired against him in 1964 while practicing the rites of his cult. Although conspiracies are notoriously difficult to anticipate, for observers as well as for the victim, there are grounds to suppose that Brezhnev is less vulnerable than was Khrushchev. Khrushchev seemed almost oblivious to his danger; for years he spent a large part of his days (from one-third to one-half) outside Moscow—engaged in diplomacy abroad or in inspecting the work performed in the provinces. Brezhnev, on the other hand,

[ ] is careful to remain in, or close by, Moscow. [ ]

[ ] Brezhnev has also taken pains to place past associates in key posts as deputies to Andropov, the head of the KGB. While Brezhnev's physical disabilities may encourage his colleagues to conspire to remove him, he is doing what he can to make such an enterprise difficult and dangerous.

Failing an effective conspiracy or a physical collapse, Brezhnev is likely to exert strong influence in the Politburo for some time. He may even enhance his power before he finally loses it.

This assessment was prepared by  
Office of Regional and  
Political Analysis. Questions and comments are  
welcome